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# Gloucester Co. levees at risk

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## LOGAN

Mayor Frank Minor was 1,240 miles away from New Orleans on Tuesday, but the images of water rising in the city's streets because of a hurricane-related levee breach haunted him.

He and other local officials here envision the same thing happening in Logan and Greenwich if repairs to two deteriorating levees and sluice gates are not made soon.

The levees and flood gates protect residents of not only Logan and Greenwich, but Harrison, East Greenwich, Woolwich and as far south as Pitman and Glassboro from flooding by the Delaware River, officials said.

If the levees were breached, river waters would also affect parts of Interstate 295 and the New Jersey Turnpike, Minor said.

Minor and other officials say that the levees and flood gates are in such disrepair that any heavy rainfall -- it doesn't need to be a hurricane or nor'easter -- could cause a breach.

"My feeling is that because of the catastrophic nature of those levees breaking, it's imperative that we do something about them," said Minor, who had a conference call about the levees on Tuesday with staff at U. S. Sen Frank Lautenberg's office.

Officials have three concerns:

A deteriorating levee that runs between the Delaware River and Logan and Greenwich for the length of the townships. It's estimated to be more than 100 years old.

Trees and dense vegetation along the levee make it unstable and hides what could be major structural problems, officials said.

Flood gates that were built around 1921 along the river near the Greenwich-Logan border also need massive repairs. Acting Gov. Richard J. Codey is expected to sign a bill in the next month to release \$2.25 million in state funds for the project, said spokesman Sean Darcy.

In Logan, a mile-long levee, built about 40 years ago perpendicular to the Delaware River along Floodgate Road, is prone to breaches. In early July, remnants of Tropical Storm Cindy ripped a 30-foot hole in the levee.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently inspected a portion of the main levee, the one that runs the length of the townships, and found that it didn't meet standards, said Ed Voigt, a spokesman for the Army Corps' Philadelphia office.

The Army Corps couldn't provide an estimate for repair costs, but state Sen. Stephen Sweeney, D-West Deptford, said the repairs would be about \$30 million.

Before the Army Corps can work with Logan and Greenwich townships to fortify the levee, it needs to have federal money in place to pay for the project, said Voigt, the corps spokesman.

It also needs easements so that crews can work on private properties.

"The concern of course is bringing the levee to the point where it's effective again," Voigt said.

Lautenberg, D-Cliffside Park, is working with Sen. Jon Corzine, D-Hoboken, and U.S. Rep. Rob Andrews, D-Haddon Heights, to find funding, said David Wald, a spokesman for Corzine.

Andrews requested \$10.6 million for the flood gates and levee restoration project in a letter he sent last month to the House subcommittee on energy and water development.

In the letter, he called the project an "urgent situation" that requires immediate assistance. "Each heavy rainfall brings a threat of devastation and financial ruin to the nearby homes," Andrews wrote.

Sarah Redrow, 68, who lives a quarter-mile from the river and the flood gates, thinks whoever owns the levee should make the repairs.

Minor wouldn't comment when asked about who actually owns the levee, saying the matter would be dealt with in due course.

Redrow and her brother, Winfield Feldman, 81, applaud Logan and Greenwich elected officials for bringing the levee issue to light.

Both believe the project should also include cleaning out the Repaupo Creek and its tributaries of 40 years of debris, silt and vegetation.

But they're not too sure the project will get out of the muck and mire of federal bureaucracy.

"It's all politics . . . Each time the politicians change, they need to learn about the project all over again," Feldman said. "Before, everyone in the community took care of the levees. We didn't get no money from anyone and we just pitched in and helped. Today, everybody wants to know how much it's going to cost."

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